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TO THE FORUM:

Here is my perspective on the work of the Charter Commission:

The people want the government to get the job done. They want the public interest to be served "honestly, efficiently, and lawfully" (Charter Section 7.05A).

Voters and elected and appointed officials share the responsibility for selecting the right people to get the job done. Without the right people in place the job will not get done even if the people clamor for it and even if we create a perfect charter reinforced by laws and rules.

Does this mean that the quality and integrity of our charter matters little in "the real world?" I think not. The charter does not guarantee sound government, it is true, but it does make sound government possible. Without the charter we guarantee a contentious, impotent mobocracy, an ego- and power-driven officialdom, or a combination of the two.

In our democracy the charter is the indispensable link between people and government. It behooves us to create the best charter we are capable of, a charter that gives the clearest expression to our representative, constitutional, democratic form of self-governing.

We have delegated the responsibility for ensuring the charter's integrity and relevance to the Charter Commission. Now more than ever since 1969 (when the present charter was created) these citizen volunteers need the support and involvement of every citizen in and out of government.

All signs indicate that the time has come for writing a new charter. In 1974 the Commission presented a revised, improved version of the charter. In 1996 the Commission proposed a method for making numerous benign but important improvements in the text of the charter. The voters rejected both alternatives in favor of continuing the practice of random amendments which have themselves sometimes added to the contradictions and confusions in the charter.

Aside from the need to make the corrections recommended in 1974 and 1996, it is now clear that the expanding complexities in society and government point up the importance, if not urgency, of making structural changes in the charter. Foremost among them, in my view, is the adoption of a county manager form of administration.

If you believe that our system of self-governing is divinely ordained and requires nothing from you beyond paying taxes and possibly casting an occasional vote to keep it alive and healthy, taking an active interest in the work of the Charter Commission is a golden opportunity to re-think your citizenship.

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